

Message Text

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TO AMEMBASSY VIENTIANE

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AMEMBASSY PHNOM PENH PRIORITY

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1. WE HAVE BEEN FOLLOWING WITH CONCERN A TREND OF EVENTS IN
LAOS THAT PRESAGES IF IT DOES NOT ALREADY POSE SOME REAL
PROBLEMS FOR US POLICY TOWARD THE PROVISIONAL GOVERNMENT OF
NATIONAL UNION. AT A TIME WHEN THE UNITED STATES HAS
SCRUPULOUSLY LIVED UP TO THE TERMS OF THE LAOS AGREEMENT
AND PROTOCOL, WHEN WE ARE PREPARING TO ASK CONGRESS FOR
\$140 MILLION IN MILITARY AND ECONOMIC AID AND WHEN WE HAVE

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LEANED OVER BACKWARDS TO DISSIPATE THE COMMUNIST BUGABOO OF

A "RIGHTIST" COUP, THE PHILOSOPHY OF THE PATHET LAO MEMBERS OF THE COALITION GOVERNMENT IS AS INTRANSIGENT AS EVER AND THE NORTH VIETNAMESE ARE BEING GIVEN A FREE RIDE. THIS IS A STATE OF AFFAIRS WHICH MAKES NO SENSE AT ALL FROM THE STANDPOINT OF US POLICY.

2. IN THE PAST TEN YEARS WE HAVE TRIED TO KEEP POLITICAL OPTIONS OPEN IN LAOS, NOT BECAUSE WE EXPECTED THAT A COALITION WOULD CONFER ANY SPECIAL ADVANTAGES ON US, BUT IN THE EXPECTATION THAT LAO NEUTRALITY WOULD BE EVEN-HANDED AND OUR GREATER STAKE IN THE DEFENSE OF SOUTH VIETNAM WOULD NOT BE JEOPARDIZED BY IT. THAT STAKE STILL EXISTS AND THE

PATHET LAO MUST REALIZE THAT WE INTEND TO HONOR IT.

3. FOR THIS REASON WE CANNOT AND WILL NOT MAKE A PUBLIC DISTINCTION BETWEEN NORTH VIETNAMESE TROOPS IN NORTH LAOS AND IN SOUTH LAOS OR TROOPS TARGETTED AGAINST LAOS AND TROOPS TARGETTED AGAINST SOUTH VIETNAM. ARTICLE 20 OF THE PARIS ACCORDS MAKES NO SUCH DISTINCTION, NOR DO THE LAOS AGREEMENT OR PROTOCOL. WHILE WE HAVE NO ILLUSIONS ABOUT NORTH VIETNAM'S INTENTION TO CONTINUE USING THE LAO PAN HANDLE AS LONG AS HANOI NEEDS IT TO ATTACK SOUTH VIETNAM; WE WILL NOT ACQUIESCE IN NORTH VIETNAMESE VIOLATION OF THEIR COMMITMENT TO WITHDRAW. IF THIS MAKES THE PATHET LAO UNCOMFORTABLE SO MUCH THE BETTER. IT MAY ENCOURAGE THEM TO BEHAVE MORE LIKE THE LAO NATIONALISTS THEY PROFESS THEMSELVES TO BE AND LESS LIKE THE NORTH VIETNAMESE SATELLITES THEY HAVE SO CLOSELY RESEMBLED SINCE JOINING THE PGNU.

4. WE BELIEVE, THEREFORE, THAT THE TIME IS APPROACHING WHEN A SHARPER LINE WILL BE NECESSARY WITH THE LAO COMMUNISTS BOTH PUBLICLY AND PRIVATELY. THE FECKLESSNESS OF THE NON-COMMUNIST LAO WILL CERTAINLY TEMPT THE PATHET LAO AND NORTH VIETNAMESE TO GREATER ARROGANCE IF THEY ALSO ENCOUNTER NO EFFECTIVE OPPOSITION TO THEIR EXCESSES BY THE US. SOUVANNA, WITHOUT AN ALTERNATIVE BASE OF NON-COMMUNIST SUPPORT EITHER WITHIN OR OUTSIDE LAOS, WILL BE UNABLE TO HALT THE DRIFT. ALREADY IT APPEARS THAT POLITICAL OPPOR-

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TUNISTS LIKE SISOUMANG SISALEUMSAK, WHO NOT SO LONG AGO WAS A FIERY COCKTAIL PARTY ORATOR AGAINST THE COMMUNISTS, ARE FALLING INTO LINE.

5. IF IN THESE CIRCUMSTANCES THE UNITED STATES REMAINS SILENT OR DOWNPLAYS NORTH VIETNAMESE VIOLATIONS OF LAO SOVEREIGNTY; IF WE PERMIT THE COMMUNIST MINISTERS TO CONCILIATE US IN PRIVATE WHILE THEY DENOUNCE US IN PUBLIC;

IF WE FAIL TO IDENTIFY OUR CONTINUED INTEREST IN A TRULY NEUTRAL LAOS; IT WILL NOT BE LONG BEFORE NON-COMMUNIST AND COMMUNIST LAO ALIKE DRAW THE CONCLUSION THAT WE HAVE ALREADY ACCEPTED WHAT SOUVANNA HAS OFTEN SAID HE WOULD NEVER ACCEPT--NORTH VIETNAMESE HEGEMONY OVER LAOS.

6. WE WILL LET YOU KNOW HOW WE INTEND TO EXPRESS OUR VIEWS ON THE NORTH VIETNAMESE PRESENCE IN LAOS AFTER JUNE 4. MEANWHILE, YOUR OWN OBSERVATIONS WOULD BE VALUABLE, PARTICULARLY ON WAYS IN WHICH WE CAN ENCOURAGE MORE COHESIVE AND EFFECTIVE POLITICAL ORGANIZATION BY THE NON-COMMUNIST LAO. THIS IN THE LAST ANALYSIS WILL BE THE ONLY RELIABLE SAFEGUARD OF LAO NEUTRALITY AND INDEPENDENCE. BROWN

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